

Introduction: A Roundup of Ideas

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The photo of the bull rider on the cover, which illustrates the rugged nature of rodeo, brings to mind a colloquial expression that is popular these days: *Don't try this at home*. This phrase, originally a disclaimer in television advertising, conveys that whatever *this* refers to is dangerous or requires expert skills. I assume such a warning is not necessary here because I doubt that any of our readers will go out and jump on a rampaging bull.

When you read the feature article in this issue, you'll learn that the seven events that constitute today's rodeos originated in the everyday work of cowboys who herded cattle in the early days of the American west. Those cowboys held competitions to see who was best at such things as calf roping and bull riding. Eventually, those competitions evolved into the professional sport of rodeo.

The evolution continues as a new species of the sport is emerging. An outfit called Professional Bull Riders Inc., whose members perform only one event—bull riding—is providing fierce competition for traditional rodeo, attracting some of the best rodeo riders, acquiring big corporate sponsors, and securing widespread television coverage for its events. Bull riding, known as the most dangerous eight seconds in sports (a rider must stay on the bull for eight seconds or be disqualified), is what we like to call an extreme sport—one you don't try at home.

What you *can* try at home—your home in the classroom, that is—are the ideas and techniques you'll find in this issue, including suggestions for fostering critical thinking in your students, enhancing extensive reading, and developing pragmatic competence. Two articles, one about maintaining discipline in the classroom and one on teacher assessment, discuss topics that can improve the classroom environment, and thus facilitate learning.

In this issue we also present the third essay in our series on American writers. Elmaz Abinader's "Just Off Main Street" illuminates how, as the child of immigrants, the author sensed that her life was separated from those of her peers by a "magic door." The lesson plans that accompany the essay will help you explore Abinader's ideas with your students.

As you can see, we've rounded up all kinds of articles for this issue. We hope you'll enjoy reading them.